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RAFFIA

METHODS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR WORK

IN THE HOME, SCHOOLS, AND
WOMEN'S INSTITUTES

BY
ANNIE L. BEGG

WITH A CHAPTER FOR YOUNG CRAFTSMEN BY
DENISE K. WREN



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TO
ARCHIBALD KNOX

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PREFACE

THE attainment of a high standard in raffia work involves the trinity of true design, good workmanship, and pleasing colour—and this satisfying whole should be the aim of every worker. Equally beautiful work may be done by using either fine or coarse strands. Such variations in texture must be determined by the requirements of the article to be made. The absence of help from elaborate equipment calls not for less art but for more. I have described in minutest detail the basic stitches, and advise concentration on these, until a reasonable proficiency has been reached. At that stage it is helpful to go to the Museums and see some of the Indian basketry. The worker will then begin to realize what can be done with raffia, and similar natural products, and will doubtless feel the true craftsman's urge toward great achievement. I implore the reader not to use ready-made designs, but to express his or her own desire as to pattern, from the very beginning. The photographs are intended merely as a help towards stimulating inventiveness. The texture of the various articles is due to a simple and broad handling of the material.

My grateful thanks are offered to the Misses G. and J. Begg for the loan of specimens of their work for photographic purposes—and to Mr. Henry Wren for the planning out and general editing of the book.

ANNIE L. BEGG.

"TE RANGI,"

ALAN ROAD,

WIMBLEDON, S.W.19.

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RAFFIA

METHODS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR WORK

CHAPTER I

THE MATERIAL

RAFFIA comes chiefly from the island of Madagascar and from parts of South America. The form in which we get it in this country is the fibrous inner covering of the huge but delicate leaves of a kind of palm, whose generic name is *Raphia*. The kind called Majunga (from its chief port of shipping in Madagascar) is the standard. It is thought that the difference between this and the at present inferior Sierra Leone type is partly due to an anatomical difference in the trees; and partly to the Sierra Leone practice of waiting till the leaves begin to wither before they are gathered, thus allowing them to attain a much darker colour. The Empire Marketing Board say that the Agricultural Department of Sierra Leone is endeavouring to improve the local product, and soon, possibly, the Sierra Leone raffia will be as good as Majunga.

The South American species is *R. Toedigera* or *Jupati*, and it is from this same species that the material so largely used by gardeners is obtained.

There is a great difference in the quality of the raffia put upon the market, and care should be taken so that the best quality is obtained. It should be of a pale straw



From the collection of the Imperial Institute

The Raffia Palm, British West Africa

colour, and the average length of strands about $1\frac{3}{4}$ yd., while the greatest breadth may be $\frac{1}{2}$ in. It is of comparatively recent years that we have taken a lesson from the natives of those palm-growing countries, and have begun to use this strong and durable medium, not only for tying up our garden plants, but for making articles of use and beauty.

Raffia has various valuable assets—it is extraordinarily durable, so that articles made of it will last for many years in constant use—it takes a dye easily, and it is very inexpensive and easy to procure.

It may be bought for about 1s. a pound in its natural colour. It is used as bought. No tools are required in its manipulation other than a strong, large-eyed needle. For convenience sake we may add a thimble and a pair of scissors, and with these humble instruments and a bundle of raffia, we can create the simplest mat or the most elaborate basket.

It will be seen in the later explanation of the method of working, that manipulation with the fingers plays almost as important a part as in clay-modelling.

CHAPTER II

THE "NUCLEUS"—THE TWO PRINCIPAL STITCHES

THERE are two main stitches in raffia work—the "lazy squaw" or "brick" stitch, and the "figure eight."

Other stitches, described later, will be seen to be variations or combinations of these two. Before employing any or all of these, we must learn to make the "nucleus"—which is invariable in all mats and baskets.

THE "NUCLEUS." Take a strand of raffia (if too wide, it may very easily be split from end to end) and thread one end through a large-eyed embroidery needle, sharp-pointed.

Make an open knot about the middle of the strand, and draw it up to, say, the size of a threepenny bit.

Hold the loop thus made with the first finger and thumb of the left hand, together with the unthreaded end of the strand, which latter, known as the "tail," should lie close to the outer circumference of the loop. Now put the needle down between the "tail" and the loop, so as to get the threaded part at the back of the work, as the stitching must be done from back to front. Now, make stitches over and over the two strands into the loop, working towards the left, until a firm ring of stitches close together is made. This ring of stitches will in future be called the "nucleus."

On this foundation we may proceed to build our more elaborate stitches, but before doing so, it will be as well to speak more at length about the treatment of the tail."



Showing the simple beginning of what may grow to be
a real work of art. "Make an open knot"

At the beginning of any piece of raffia work, the "tail," as has been shown, consists of the latter half of the single strand with which the needle was first threaded.

After stitching over this for a row or two, it may be almost used up, or it may be getting thin or frayed—it is therefore necessary to strengthen it by the addition of another strand.

To do this, lay the second strand horizontally upon the first, allowing a short end to protrude towards the right. Take a stitch or two over both strands into the previous work, and double back the short protruding end behind the work so that it also makes a further addition to the "tail." This process has often to be repeated as the work proceeds.

No fixed rule can be made as to when to thicken the "tail," as raffia strands vary continually in thickness and length.

If a very fine and pliable effect is required (as for instance, in the all-raffia hat), very thin strands would be added, and that infrequently.

If, however, a thick, solid mat or basket is desired, the "tail" would be strengthened until it consisted of, perhaps, five or six strands, and kept at that thickness by frequent additions. A thick "tail" should be given a frequent twist with the left hand to further solidify the work and keep the rows of work an even thickness.

Raffia is very easily split, and by the constant drawing out from the bundle of suitable strands to work with, there will gradually accumulate a kind of ravel of odd bits and frayed ends. This need not be wasted—it can be pulled out and added *en masse* to the "tail," where a very thick one is required, as for a floor mat.



The position of the needle after the loop is drawn up.
The thread is being taken to the back of the work
before commencing the first row



Before starting off on the adventure of mat or basket—
"the Nucleus"



The introduction of a fresh "tail" strand. The short end on the right will be turned back into the "tail" after a stitch or two has been taken over it, to bind it to the previous work

Thus, it can be seen that raffia work is easily the most economical of all the "crafts," as every part of the material can be utilized—there is no need to waste a shred.

To return from this slight digression to the work itself. When the strand in the needle is getting used up, unthread it, and turn the remaining end into the "tail." When a new strand is threaded, lay the end of it, also, in the "tail," and fasten all together with a long stitch into the row before. This stitch (over the "tail" and into the solid work) will be referred to later as the "nucleus" stitch.

THE "BRICK" STITCH. We will now proceed, on the "nucleus" previously described, to build the "brick" stitch, which is the simpler of the two basic stitches.

Method. Hold the "nucleus" as before, with the first finger and thumb of the left hand, together with the "tail," but allowing the "tail" to be slightly apart from it. Make a stitch over the "tail" only, that is—bring the thread over the "tail," putting the needle down between the "tail" and the "nucleus," or, in other words, bind the "tail," working, as always, to the left, and towards the centre of the "nucleus." Make the next stitch right across the "tail" and into the solid part of the work. The third stitch will be over the "tail" only, like the first, and the fourth stitch will be a replica of the second. Alternate these long and short stitches round the "nucleus" till you arrive where you commenced. In the next row, instead of every alternate stitch (the long one) being taken into the "nucleus," it will now be made into the preceding row of work. The stitches will alternate as before, and

as the work grows, every other stitch (the long one) being taken into the previous row, the "brick" pattern appears. In a round or oval mat, as the circumference is continually increasing, it will be found necessary (probably as early as the second row) to make two



A mat worked in "brick" stitch, showing position of needle in the short stitch where the "tail" only is bound

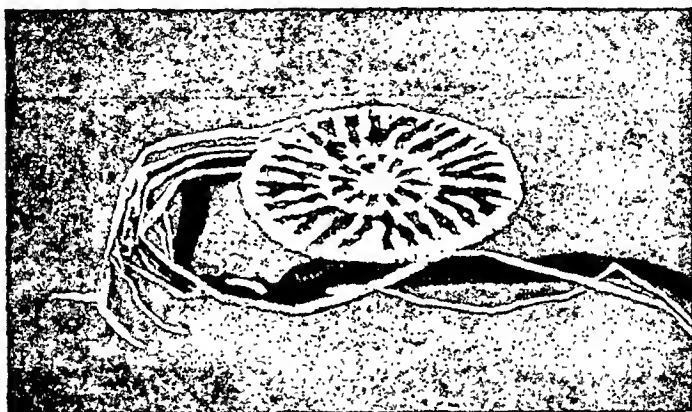
stitches instead of one, over the "tail" between the long stitches. Then, in the next row, an extra "long" stitch would be made between these two short ones, thus allowing for the gradual lengthening of circumference and for keeping the work flat.

Speaking of the flatness of a mat, it is here that manipulation plays such an important part. It is



The "short" stitch of the "brick" pattern. It is taken over the "tail" only

necessary, almost at every stitch, to slightly pull the work towards the right, using the thumb and first finger of the right hand. The stitches should not be pulled up too tightly. Manipulation is also required to regulate the shape of the work. If the mat or basket is intended to be oval, the round "nucleus," at the beginning of the second row, should be pulled into the



An example of "Brick" stitch worked in black and "natural"

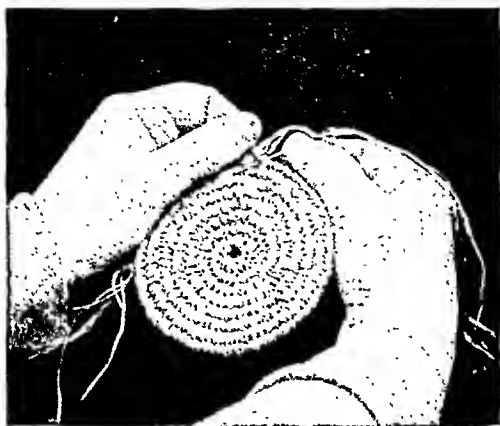
shape required. If the work is to be rectangular, the corners must be pulled out firmly at the beginning, and then it will be found that each succeeding row makes the sides more definite.

The importance of this manipulation in raffia work cannot be insisted upon too strongly. If the worker goes on stitching, forgetful of this, uneven edges and general shapelessness will be the result.

THE FIGURE-EIGHT STITCH. We will now proceed to the figure-eight stitch.

The "nucleus" is the same as for the "brick" stitch. It has been already described but may be repeated here for convenience sake.

Make an open knot about the middle of the strand selected for use. Draw it up to about the size of a threepenny bit. Hold the loop thus made, with the first finger and thumb of the left hand, together

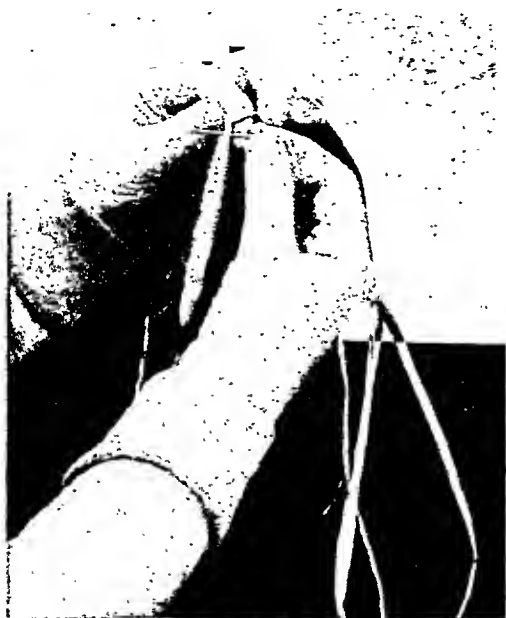


A small mat, showing the "figure-eight" stitch, -
with its regular, ribbed appearance

with the unthreaded end of the strand, which latter, known as the "tail," should lie close to the outer circumference of the loop. With the threaded end make stitches over and over the two strands into the loop, working to the left, and from back to front until a firm ring of stitches is made. On this foundation, or "nucleus" proceed with the figure-eight stitch as follows—

Hold the work, as before, between the first finger

and thumb of the left hand. Instead, however, of holding the "tail" close to the circumference of the ring, hold it slightly apart. For the first stitch bring the needle up between the "tail" and the ring. Bind



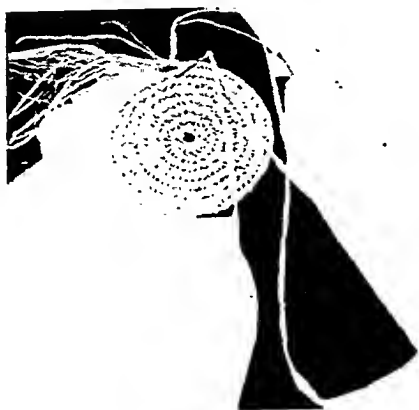
"Figure-eight" stitch, showing position of needle for the first half of the stitch

the "tail" with one overcasting stitch, bringing the needle up again between the "tail" and the ring. Then take a stitch downwards into the thickness of the ring.

(An "overcasting" stitch means that the thread is brought up first on the side of the "tail" nearest to

the worker, is then "cast over" the "tail," and brought up again in the place from which it started. We shall use this term "overeasting" in future without further explanation.)

The stitch we have been describing at length, when drawn up, will be seen to resemble an 8, hence its name.



"Figure-eight" stitch, showing position of needle for the second half of the stitch.

It takes longer to work than the "brick" stitch, or indeed, any of the other variations or combinations, as the stitches should lie as close to each other as it is possible to get them. It makes, however, the most durable work, as each row is really covered twice. There are no alternations in this stitch—every one is the same, and should lie close to its neighbour.

When the work has grown a little, it will be seen to

consist of a succession of even ridges. It is particularly important to keep the "tail" at the same thickness.

If it is allowed to bulge in one place, and get too thin in another, the pleasing effect of the work will be completely destroyed.

CHAPTER III

VARIATIONS—PATTERNED WORK—PRESSING AND FINISHING

FROM the basic stitches many variations in texture and colour may be made, according to the inventive power of the worker. Two or three may be suggested as a stimulus to inventive enterprise.

“NUCLEUS” STITCH (VARIABLE COLOUR). Where, for example, a mat or basket is being worked in coloured raffia, and it is desired to blend the colours in a mass, without showing very distinctive rows, or a design other than a mosaic of colour, the same stitch should be used as has been described in the making of the “nucleus”—threading the different colours as required. To make a still more irregular distribution of colour, vary the length of the stitches.

I have found an interesting effect obtained by using strands of different colours, one after the other, ignoring the fact of one being short and another long or medium. One may be using as many as seven different shades, their strands being of varying lengths.

One may decide on a certain order of rotation, say, for instance, green to follow blue, and that to be followed by purple or grey, and so on, according to taste. Then, if this order is kept up, using the varying lengths of strands for a whole mat or basket, the resultant maze of colour is very intriguing. There is a sense of design without a definite enclosing line.

This “nucleus” stitch is the quickest and easiest mode of working. It makes a very firm mat or basket,

but lacks the regularity of the "brick" stitch or "figure eight."

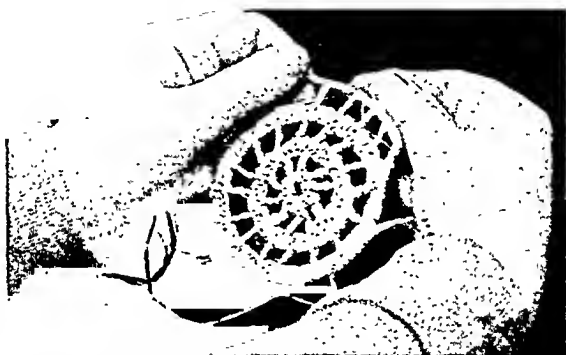
PIERCED WORK. Square or oblong open spaces may be introduced into raffia work, giving what in architecture is known as a "pierced" effect. Such spaces make a charming border to mats and bags, etc., and are produced in the following manner.

Method. At the point where the piercing is required, hold the "tail" away from the work in as upright a position as possible. Bind this with two or three stitches round and round, thus making a bar. Then bend the "tail" into a horizontal position (parallel to the work) and again make a few stitches over and over, forming another solid bar. Then, still keeping the "tail" in the same position, drop a long stitch into the work, and by manipulation, keep the work flat, and the long stitch equal in length to the first upright bar. Bind this long stitch with stitches taken round it, till you reach the "tail," and proceed along the "tail" in the same way as before, till the next long stitch is made. If the strand you are using is rather thin, it is better to drop two long stitches instead of one—which, when bound, make a really solid bar. Every long stitch taken should point to the centre of the "nucleus" as the spokes of a wheel point to the hub.

You have now completed an open space composed of three solid bars, and a fourth side consisting of the previous solid work. The last bar made is always the first of the next space, and the "tail" will be bound again as far as the next long stitch. In this way a succession of rectangular open spaces will be made round the mat or basket, and solid work may again be worked on to the top bars of the spaces. A second, or

even a third, row of spaces can be put above the first row, but it is always advisable to have at least one row of "solid work" in between. If the spaces are too frequent, or too large, the solidity and durability of the work would be imperilled.

A variation of this stitch is to take only one stitch over, or round, as the case may be, each of the three



An example of "pierced" work, showing rows of spaces following each other with the necessary amount of solid work between

bars. This makes a tiny hole between each stitch, and is very decorative.

CHAIN STITCH SPIRALS.—*Method.* After making the usual firm ring of stitches or "nucleus," take three stitches (working towards the centre) over the "tail" only—then one long stitch across the "tail" and into the solid part of the ring. Repeat this alternately for the first row. For the second row, four stitches over the "tail" only may be necessary to keep pace with

the growing circumference of the mat, and the long stitch passing across the "tail" must now be taken into the centre of the long stitch in the previous row. These short and long stitches alternating, when repeated row after row, give the appearance of lines of chain stitch, with solid work between the lines. With each successive row, it will be found necessary to increase the number of the short "tail" stitches, and



The Chain Stitch Spiral. The chain is here worked in black so that it may show more distinctly, but it is effective even when the whole is carried out in "natural"

if this increase were continued indefinitely, the solidity of the work would be destroyed. Therefore, when the space between the chain stitches develops to, say, a quarter of an inch, it is necessary to start another line of the long stitches in the middle of the space, while still continuing the old lines.

As all raffia work arranges itself as a spiral, these lines of chain stitches are very effective, running round the mat or basket in a spiral of pattern.

They would be even more decorative if worked in

colour, with the solid work in between in "natural" or another colour.

PATTERNED WORK. After learning how to make the various raffia stitches already described, the worker should pass on to explore the possibilities of the introduction of coloured strands not only in a mosaic of colour, referred to under "Stitches," but in definite patterns, such as checks, stripes, triangles, etc. The possibilities are almost endless.

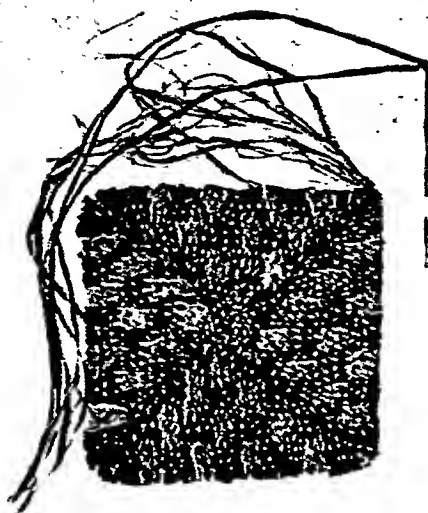
If a design is going to be worked in a mat or basket, it is always best to first work it out on paper in colour. If, then, the effect is not quite satisfactory, it can be altered—but, if the work is commenced with the design simply floating about in the worker's head, it will be much more difficult to express it perfectly.

The undoing of raffia work is a most tedious job, as will be found if mistakes are made. The strands get frayed and knotted, and can only be used again for the thickening of the "tail."

To describe the method of working out a design, we will take a hypothetical case.

Suppose it is desired to make a square mat with the groundwork of "natural," and squares of blue and red alternately at regular intervals.

Begin with the "nucleus" in "natural." When that is finished, by manipulation, pull it into the shape of a square. Continue for a row or two (we will suppose the mat is to be worked in the "nucleus" stitch), then, in the centre of the side of the square you have arrived at, turn back the strand into the "tail" with its needle still attached. Thread a fresh needle with blue, and make two or three stitches (according to the size of spot required) side by side. Repeat the process of



A mat, showing a design of spots of colour. If desired, it could be continued from this point, reducing successively the number of spots, so that the finished mat would show them in diamond formation on each side

turning back the strand (of blue, this time), into the "tail," with the needle still attached. Now, recover the "natural" strand from the "tail" and continue stitches to the end of that side of the square, round the corner (which must be well pulled out) and as far as about the centre of the second side. Pass the strand again into the "tail" and thread a fresh needle with red raffia. Repeat the former processes as far as the centre of the third side of the square, where blue stitches will again be introduced, while the centre of the fourth side will show red again. The next two or three rows will be the same. If three coloured stitches be taken for the base of the spots, it will take three rows of work to develop the spot into a little square mass of colour.

If the strands used happen to be very long ones, they can be recovered from the "tail" (as shown) when the time comes to work with them, and after being used for the few necessary stitches, they can disappear into the "tail" again till required further. This goes on till they are used up, when a new thread must be introduced. Keeping them threaded saves time and trouble.

When the four blocks of colour have arrived at their full size, the next row will begin, as usual, with "natural" and continue until you reach to about the centre of the space between the corner and the first colour block. Here a few coloured stitches are taken again to begin a new spot. You may make this new spot red. Continue with "natural" till the same middle distance is reached between the original spot and the second corner of the square. Here, the first line of the new spot will be blue. This process is repeated on the other two sides of the mat, alternating

red and blue for the spots, with the "natural" in between. When several rows like this have been worked, it is seen that instead of one block of colour only, on each side of the mat, there are two. After that, it is only a question of keeping the same distance of "natural" work between the spots, and, as the mat grows in size, there will naturally be one extra block of colour about every three rows of work, always alternating red and blue.

If a stripe is wanted, or a triangle, the same method is adopted, namely, using as much of the coloured strand as required, and then carrying it on in the "tail" until it is needed again—doing this with each of the colours as they are used, and repeating the rows of work until the stripe is the required length. In the case of a triangle of colour, the first row will be the longest, and each succeeding row will be decreased by a stitch on each side of the centre stitch. Thus, if the first row (that is, the base), consisted of five stitches, the second would consist of three, and the third (the apex) of one.

PRESSING. All flat pieces of raffia work, such as mats, bases of baskets, sides, ends, and handles of bags, and embroidered work, should be well pressed, by laying a cloth, which has been wrung out in water, over the right side of the work, and pressing well, with a very hot iron. This, besides flattening and stiffening the work, gives it a slight polish, and yet avoids the sticky-looking and unnatural gloss given to it if the raffia has been previously "glycerined." There is a great vogue, at the present moment, for using coloured "glycerined" raffia; personally, I feel that its use should be deprecated. It seems to alter the nature of the material—

has a tendency to rot the strands, so that they split easily and fray out in the working, and it gives the raffia a damp, clammy feeling to the touch, which is most unpleasant, both during the working and in handling the article afterwards.

FINISHING OFF. A word here may be said as to "finishing off" in raffia work. It equally applies to mats and baskets.

Method. When the "nucleus" is finished, the work, as has been already pointed out, then starts off on a spiral course. The end, therefore, of a mat or basket should be in a line with its commencement, so as to secure an even width of work from the centre to the circumference all round. Some inches before the end is reached, the thickness of the "tail" must be gradually reduced, by cutting out strands, till, at the finish, it is a mere thread or so, and can be stitched over into the preceding row without any appreciable ridge.

CHAPTER IV

DYEING

I WOULD strongly urge all raffia workers to dye their raffia at home.

It is quite a simple process, and a sufficiently large quantity to carry on the worker for some time can be dyed in a good sized fish-kettle. Dyeing the raffia at home makes the craft doubly interesting, and also the work done will be individual—for no two people get exactly the same results in dyeing, either in the primary colours, or in combination. Dyeing your own material is also very much less expensive than buying the coloured raffia from shops, but the chief advantages are in being able to satisfy your own individual taste, and in having the joy and possibilities attendant on experiment. If the beginner is chary of trying the vegetable dyes at first, quite good results may be obtained with some of the modern household dyes on the market—and by mixing them in various proportions the most delightful shades appear. The method is as follows—

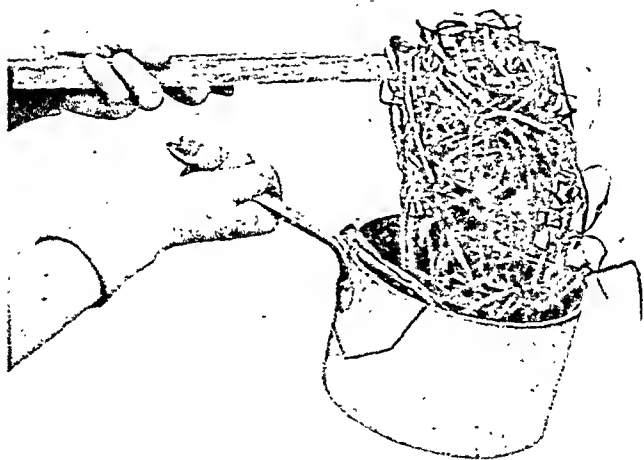
First steep your raffia at least one hour, if no longer time is possible. The best plan, however, is to sort out your raffia as to quantity, tie it together at one end, and let it steep all night in the bath—or if that is not available, coiled round in a bucket of water, for dyeing the following day. The thorough soaking not only softens the raffia (so that it takes the dye better) and causes the strands to open out to their full width, but it takes out a certain amount of the yellow pigment with which the raffia is impregnated in its natural

state, and this enables purer colours to be obtained. If a greenish-blue is desired, then naturally the method would be to steep the raffia for its minimum time, so as to retain as much as possible of the yellow pigment. Then, if a rather weak solution of blue dye is used, the effect will be as desired.

When the actual dyeing begins have your pan three-parts full of water, say, about 2 quarts. Bring to the boil and put in your dye. If it is a household dye, it should be crushed, to make it dissolve more quickly, and a whole unit of dye at least used to that quantity of water. Stir the liquid with a wooden stick till the dye is dissolved. Then give the wet raffia a squeeze and put it in. Personally, I do not weigh out a fixed quantity of raffia, but put in as much as the pan will comfortably hold, so that when pressed down well with the stick all is immersed. Let the dye come again to the boil, and keep it boiling for six minutes, frequently pressed down and moved about with the stick. After six minutes take the pan away from the fire, and let the raffia steep in the dye for twenty minutes, giving it an occasional stir. Then lift the raffia out with the stick into a clean kitchen-sink and turn on the tap—lifting the raffia about till the loose dye is all washed away. When the water comes away clear, give the bundle a squeeze and hang it over a clothes-horse in the garden to dry, or spread it on the lawn. The amount of time given for steeping, boiling, etc., applies to all household dyes that I have used.

We will now consider the use of vegetable dyes for raffia. Many artist-craftsmen consider that the colours obtained from them are better than those dyes made by the chemist, though chemicals have to be added to

the dye-bath as "mordants" to make the vegetable dye "bite." Some think the vegetable dyes fade less easily than the household dyes. As regards this proposition, my own experience has shown that neither of them fades at all quickly if dyed and washed well



Lifting a bundle of raffia from its dye-bath to be rinsed before drying

and carefully. But when the colour does go, it is apt to disappear entirely in the case of the household dyes, while a mat or basket dyed with the vegetable dyes takes on, with age and exposure, the soft, beautiful "weathered" look of an old building. There is much to be said for the fascination of going off to the fields and moors, gathering your own lichen, heather tips, etc., and making a satisfying colour from the boiling of them.

Many of the most useful vegetable dyes do not grow in this country, however, but may be bought ready for use.

Fustic chips, with a mordant of bichromate of potash, gives a strong yellow, also onion skins boiled with alum. The mordants are added to the dye-bath and dissolved, before putting in the raffia.

Exact information as to quantities, etc., can be obtained from May Holding's (M. Holding, The Croft, Sutton, nr. Pulboro', Sussex) book, *Notes on Spinning and Dyeing Wool*, as, although that book was written for wool-dyers, the information as to mixtures and quantities is a good guide to raffia dyers.

With natural as with chemical dyes, experience is the best teacher, and experimenting is the salt of life to a craft-worker. Gray crottle, from weathered rocks, requires no mordant. It can be mixed with the raffia in the pan, and boiled, steeped, and washed together. What has not been left in the sink after the washing process shakes out of the raffia, when dry, quite easily. As much bulk of crottle is needed as bulk of raffia used to make a good strong colour, and an hour or two's boiling is necessary. It gives a warm yellow, and the piece of work in which it is used will give forth the pleasant faint scent that we associate with Harris tweeds.

The best blue I know of is obtained from Indigo. It can be bought in paste form with its mordant already added to it. The water should be kept just below boiling point for this dye. A tablespoonful or two (according to the depth of shade required) should be added to the pan and stirred well before putting in the raffia. This is such a strong dye that the same dye-bath can

be used over and over again for fresh bundles of steeped raffia, producing paler and softer shades, until the dye is exhausted. If a distinctly "grey" blue is required, logwood may be used with mordants of bichromate of potash, and tartar. For reds, cochineal with "tin" mordant may be used, or madder with alum.

Details of these recipes are given in the book already mentioned.

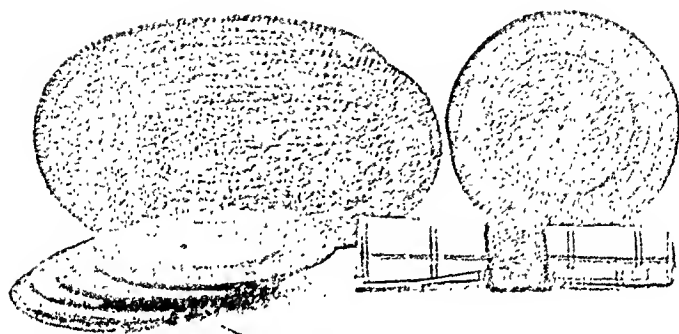
CHAPTER V

MATS AND SCREENS

MANY uses can be found in the home for raffia mats. Apart from their usefulness and durability, they have a high artistic value if well executed and made of beautifully coloured raffia. A pleasing effect is also produced by combining a little colour with the "natural" or undyed material.

The following are a few suggestions for mats, and the various methods of working them—

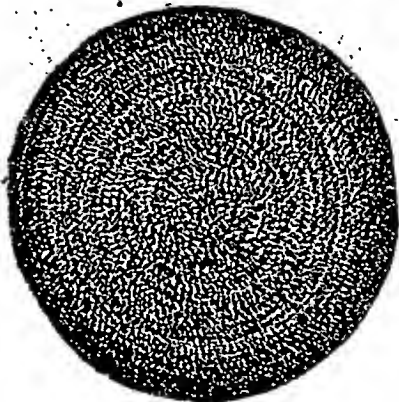
SET OF TABLE MATS. A set of table mats usually includes two for meat dishes, about 10 in. in diameter; two for vegetable dishes, 8 in. in diameter; and six for plates, 6 in. in diameter. They may be round, oval, or rectangular in shape, and should be solid and substantial. There is no great point in having the main part of the mats of any elaborate design or colour, as it will be quite covered by the dish or plate. Either the "brick" stitch, "figure-eight," or "nucleus" stitch may be employed. I myself prefer the "nucleus" stitch for such mats, using "natural" for all but a fairly broad border. This border is very effective worked in the same stitch in three different shades—each colour worked into the preceding one, so that the result is a harmonious blend. If a very broad border is wanted of the blended shades—five, or even seven, rows would be required. If three colours were used, they could alternate. Should, however, a border be desired composed of distinct colours lying side by side, at least two rows of each colour are necessary to show



A set of table-mats worked with centres of "natural," and wide, coloured borders. The serviette-ring worked in the same colouring is a decorative adjunct to the table

a distinct band. A still more elaborate border might be composed of three rows of blended colour, then one row of small open spaces, then three rows of the same colouring to finish the mat.

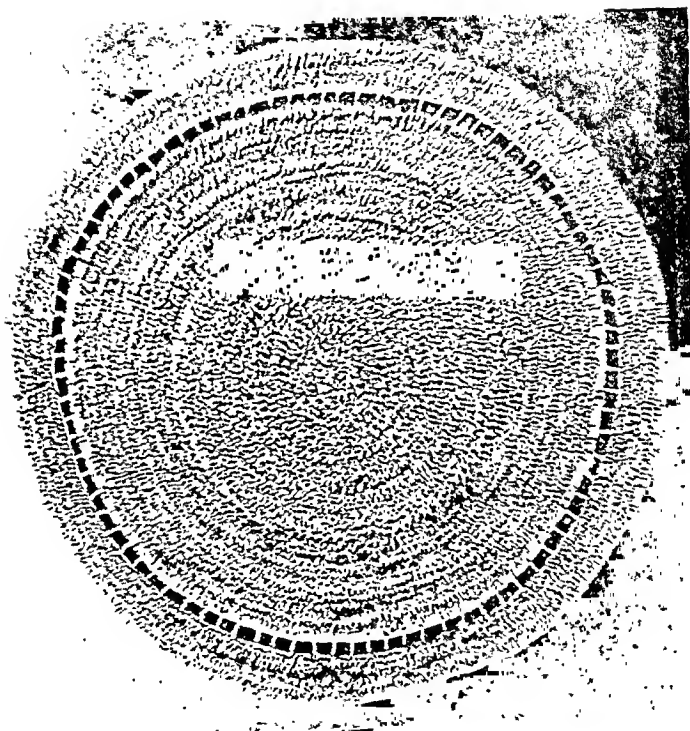
PLANT MATS. These, again, can be of any shape—though, perhaps, round ones are the most satisfactory.



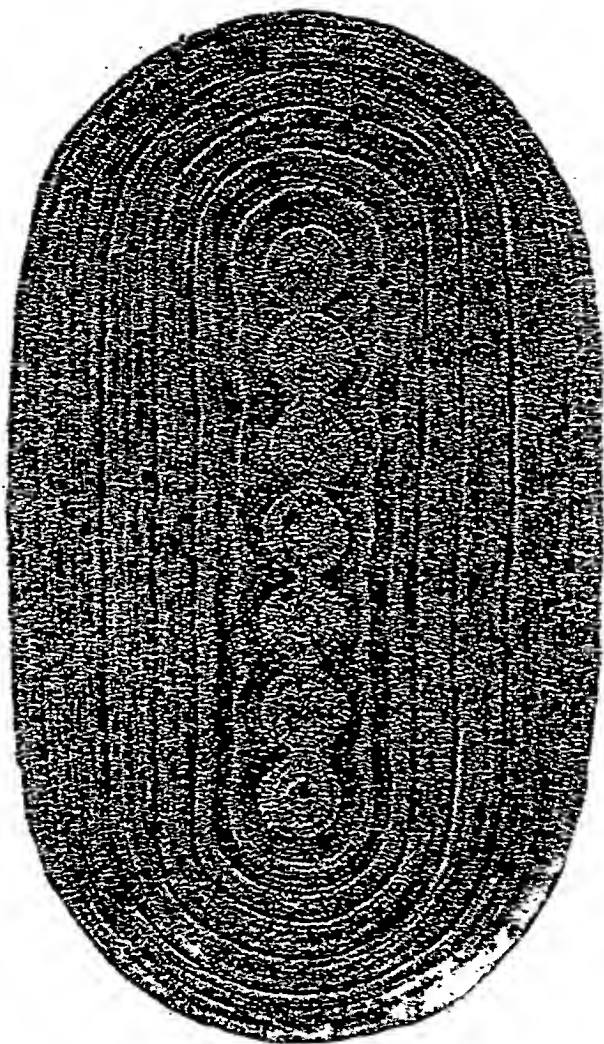
A floor mat worked in the "nucleus" stitch in varying shades of colour. Such a mat looks particularly well on an oak floor

They should be about 6 in. in diameter, and may be of "natural" with coloured border to harmonize with the colour scheme of the room. They look particularly attractive on a casement window sill, as well as being useful, not only as plant stands, but also for bowls of flowers.

TABLE-CENTRE. A mat large enough for a table-centre looks extremely well worked in colours to match



A many-coloured table-centre showing how decorative open spaces can be



An oval floor-mat, the long centre line of which is formed by a succession of small mats joined together. The three-cornered spaces between the small mats are gradually filled up until the lines become practically straight.

In a mat beginning with the ordinary "nucleus" it has been shown that the shape must be decided at once, by manipulation. In this case, the oval ends are a development of the first and last round mats—partly by manipulation and partly by a slight thickening of the "tail" at that point, until the oval has become sufficiently defined. After that, the regular thickness of "tail" is employed. This mat was carried out in greens and "natural"—the size being about 52 inches long and 28 inches wide

the colour scheme of the room. It should be about 12 in. in diameter, and looks best worked in the "nucleus" stitch, so that the colours may be blended together. It may be any shape desired.

FLOOR MATS. Large floor mats are most satisfactory when made of raffia. I should say they are more durable than any other kind. Such mats should be about $1\frac{1}{4}$ yd. long by $\frac{3}{4}$ yd. wide, if oblong—or about 1 yd. in diameter if round. They should be worked in the "nucleus" stitch over a very thick "tail," say, about the thickness of the second finger of the hand. Some think a blend of many colours looks better than an elaborate definite design.

These mats look very well on a polished floor. They may be round, oval, or rectangular. For a beginner, the round or oval shape is the easiest, as it requires experience in manipulation to make the corners of a rectangular mat straight and accurate.

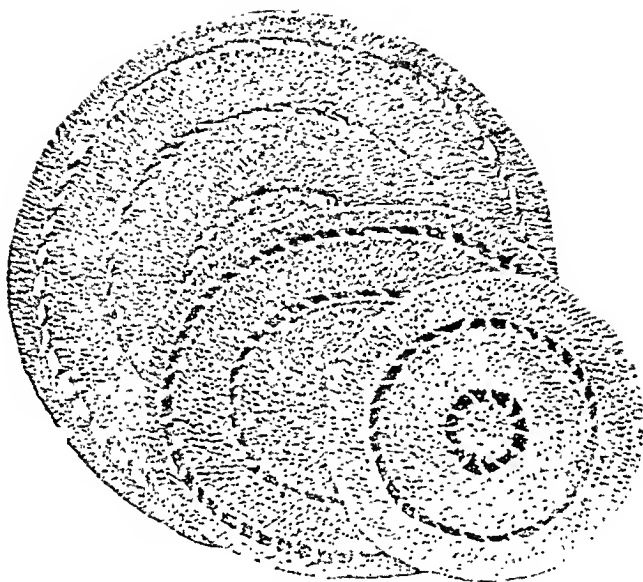
A variation of this may be made by joining a number of small mats together. Such a co-operative mat should be interesting for a village institute to work at. The mat might be composed of square or oblong small mats sewn together with raffia, with, perhaps, a border of a couple of inches wide in one of the colours used. Another variation might be a series of small, round mats in one colour, joined to form a strip down the centre. The small triangular spaces may be filled up with "natural," and the rest of the mat also worked in "natural," with the exception of a band of the same colour as used in the centre row of mats being worked a short distance from the outer edge of the mat.

A good effect is also produced by making a large rectangular mat first, and then adding to each end a

series of small rectangular mats joined together, and thus forming a broad border at each end of the big mat.

GARDENING MATS. These are very useful and comfortable for kneeling upon while gardening. They may be round or oblong, and should be worked in "natural" over a very thick "tail." They should have a handle at one end, made of a few strands of raffia closely buttonholed with raffia.

I made a rather large gardening-mat on one occasion, for a friend, and was amused, on my next visit, to find it being used as a chair-back, to hide the deficiencies of a shabby, but still comfortable, little chair! Eventually a round mat was made to cover the seat, and very nice, indeed, the chair looked, besides being most warm and comfortable to sit upon and against. Here is an idea for the inventive worker, and we may well add the "Covering of Furniture" to our list of possibilities in raffia work. Another way of upholstering in raffia which I have seen tried most successfully, is to take sacking, or some similar durable material, and cover it completely with stitchery in coloured raffia. It could be stitched in a zigzag pattern, every row close to the preceding one, so that none of the background would show. It should be well pressed before attaching it to the chair (see section on Pressing). When cutting out the material, the shape of the chair to be covered must be followed, and a good margin left for turning-in. If liked, gimp, such as is used by upholsterers, could be laid along the turned-in edges, and brassheaded nails used to fasten the work to the framework of the chair. The colouring should harmonize with the colour scheme of the room, and quiet tones used, blending them one with the other.



A set of toilet mats. worked in "natural." Open spaces form the decoration. This set has been in use for nine years

TOILET MATS. A set of these in raffia looks extremely well on a bedroom washstand. They may be round, oval, or square in shape, worked in "natural" or coloured raffia, and may have a border of open spaces to give a more decorative appearance. If the washstand has a marble top, it is a great safeguard against breakages to have such thick, soft mats.

SPLASHERS. Still another use for a raffia mat is to hang it on the wall as a splasher, behind the washstand, in the bedroom, or the hand-basin or bath in the bath-room. In this case, as the mat would require to be of considerable size, it could be a multiform one, that is, made up of a number of smaller mats, the same size, joined together with raffia.

A long mat with rectangular sides, and oval or pointed ends, looks very well on a wall.

SCREENS. A folding screen with its sides of raffia work, either for use in the house or on a veranda, is a delightful object. It reminds one of the grass screens of India, though in our climate it would hardly be necessary to soak it in water, that the hot air, blowing through, might be cooled! In the case of this screen, the mats must be made to fit the sections of the framework, and a good effect would be obtained by working them in "natural" with borders of colour.

CHAPTER VI

BASKETS—LIDS—CANE FOUNDATION

MANY kinds and shapes of baskets may be made of raffia. In some cases the introduction of cane may be necessary for stability. This will be treated of in a further section. We will first describe the making of the simplest form of work-basket.

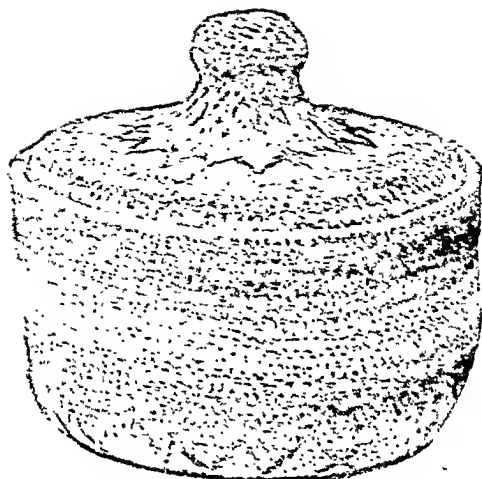
SIMPLE WORK-BASKET.—*Method.* Begin with the solid ring or "nucleus," as before described, and proceed to make a round mat of solid work.

The "brick" stitch, the "figure-eight," or the "nucleus" stitch may be employed.

When the mat is large enough to form a base for the size of basket required, reverse the work, so that when holding it the right side of it is underneath, and the "tail" still to the left. Now, place the "tail" on the top of the previous row of work, instead of side by side with it, as in the working of the mat—taking care not to draw the basket in, as yet, by drawing the "tail," but rather keeping the work a little loose, and slanting outwards. This is to ensure a gradual curve-out of the side of the basket.

After a considerable number of rows (the number determined by the size of the basket desired) the greatest circumference will have been reached, and a beginning must be made to very slightly draw the "tail."

A gentle pull after every three or four stitches should be made. There can be no rule laid down as to the amount of "drawing in" required for any basket. It

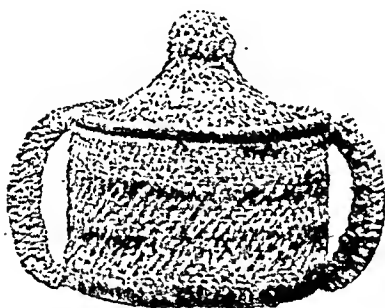


A work-basket without the outer flange, in which the lid fits firmly into the mouth of the basket. It is decorated with a zig-zag pattern in a contrasting colour to that of the ground-work

must always be determined by the size and shape desired.

A suggestion for a first basket might be that the work should be gradually drawn in until the mouth of the basket is the size of the base, which may be 4 in. in diameter.

This small basket, as to method of working, can be taken as a model for all round baskets standing on a



This is a useful little work-basket. The treatment of the handles should be noticed. They are easy to take hold of, and at the same time decorative. Note that the knob is a part of the lid

flat base. A strong sense of shape and proportion, in the worker, is absolutely necessary in order to obtain satisfactory results, and this cannot be imparted by the written word. This important sense may, however, be cultivated by the careful study of beautiful work in exhibitions and museums.

The special points to be noticed are—the width, in relation to the height, and the width and height in relation to the size of base.

The subject of lids will be treated in a section to itself.

Raffia is the right material for work-baskets because they really need no lining, although linings give a finishing touch. If they are worked closely and carefully not even a pin can drop through, and the interior and exterior are so neat and smooth that there is nothing to catch when the hand is brought out full of sewing, or sewing-materials.

We now come to variations in baskets. Many may be invented by the worker, but a few may be here suggested as a spur to such invention.

Instead of the immediate "curve-out" of the side of the basket from its base, a small vertical wall may be built, by holding the "tail" exactly on the top of each previous row—and by manipulation with the fingers as the work proceeds. This transforms the base into the simplest form of pedestal. When sufficiently high, say, $\frac{1}{4}$ in., the "tail" must be moved to the outer edge (nearest the worker) of the last row, and the "curve-out" begun. Then, when the "curve-out" and the "drawing-in" have been accomplished, a similar vertical wall may be made around the mouth of the basket, forming a lip.

If a flat lid is attached, the appearance will suggest the pleasing effect which a ginger-jar has to the eye.

Instead of the vertical lip being finished off thus, a second "curve-out" may be made from the top of the wall for a few rows, making an overhanging eave to the wall—thus giving a play of light and shade and a more decorative effect.

The side of the basket may be taken up from the base without a curve, but at a slant—forming a gradually

increasing circumference. so that the widest part of the basket is at the top. The result will be a flower-pot shape.

Instead of a round shape, a basket may have several rectangular sides. The base of the mat must, naturally, be also rectangular, with an equal number and length of sides, and the "turning-up" from the flat base is done in the same manner as shown before—that is, by holding the "tail" on the top of the preceding row and toward the edge nearest to the worker—working as always to the left.

By this method the wrong side of the worked base is uppermost. If the basket is not intended to be lined, and it is desired to have the right side of the base showing inside the basket, the base must be turned into that position before "turning up" the side, and the "tail" must then be turned back on itself, so that the worker can still proceed from right to left, and the basket still be moulded from the outside.

We may now mention a few more of the different kinds of baskets which can be made of raffia, with some explanatory remarks upon each.

WASTE-PAPER BASKETS. If it is desired to make a round one, it is advisable to keep the "tail" at a uniform thickness of five or six strands, and to give it a frequent twist with the left hand, holding it to the work rather tightly. This will ensure the very firm and solid basket which would be necessary for such a purpose.

A four-sided basket also looks well for such a use. The base would, of course, be made square, and when the sides are of a sufficient height and the work finished off, a stout piece of cane may be held from base to top at each corner, and overcast closely with raffia to the

sides of the basket. This makes the basket rigid, and keeps the sides from sagging with use.

Further suggestions for a large round waste-paper basket are that the base might be "natural," and when the circumference is sufficiently large, a thick piece of cane might be incorporated with the "tail" to give greater solidity. It need not be carried on further than one round. Then the "turn-up" should begin, and continue in "natural" for, say, a couple of inches, followed by a band of colour perhaps an inch wide. The bulk of the basket would continue to be in "natural," ending off with, say, three bands of colour divided by a narrow interval of "natural." The last colour band would form the rim.

If handles are desired, one decorative method would be to make, during the working of the solid body of the basket, eight open spaces, very shallow, on each side of the round cylinder—four pairs of holes parallel to each other and equal in size. Let the top pair lie immediately below the coloured rim, and almost 3 in. apart. Then, assuming the basket to be 14 in. high, let the three remaining pairs be vertically under each other, about 1 in. apart. A separate handle should be made of a thick "tail" of strands (strengthened by cane if desired) and tightly bound round with the same colour as used in the bands. This handle (when the basket is otherwise finished) should be laced through the holes. Push it from front to back through the top pair of holes first, leaving sufficient for taking hold of comfortably—bring it out through the second pair—push it back through the third pair—and, finally, bring the ends out at the fourth pair. The ends could then be knotted, or, better still, pushed into hollow raffia

buttons (see "Pochettes") and sewn firmly with raffia to the button. The button should be made large enough to prevent the handle from slipping back through the last holes.

All this process repeated on the opposite side of the basket gives two handles, which are both useful and decorative.

SHOPPING BASKETS. These also should be worked firmly with a thick "tail." As they are intended to carry a considerable weight, they may be strengthened with cane—or they may be made entirely of cane, overcast closely with raffia. In this case the method is exactly the same as for the all-raffia basket, except that cane takes the place of raffia to form the "tail."

The end of the cane should be soaked for several hours before using, to make it more pliable for the small "nucleus."

The "figure-eight" stitch is useful for such a basket, and near the top open spaces may be made (as before described) to lighten the appearance of the basket and its weight. If the handle is also to be made of cane, three or four strands of it should be held side by side, and raffia woven in and out of them—each weave pushed up close to its neighbour. When the desired length of handle is obtained, its two ends should be held together underneath the basket at the centre of its base, and firmly stitched through with raffia. This firm stitching should be repeated at intervals up the sides to the brim, using the same colour of raffia as has been chosen for the handles. This method allows of considerable weight being carried without fear of the handles breaking, or coming away from the sides.

BASKET FOR STRING. Make a round mat a little

larger than the base of a ball of string. Turn up the sides and continue to a little beyond the height of the ball. Make another round mat as lid, leaving the loop of the "nucleus" a little larger than usual, so that the string slips through easily. Sew the lid on at one side with raffia. At the opposite side buttonhole a loop of raffia, and sew on to the basket a wooden bead as button, or make a raffia button as described under the heading "Buttons and Loops."

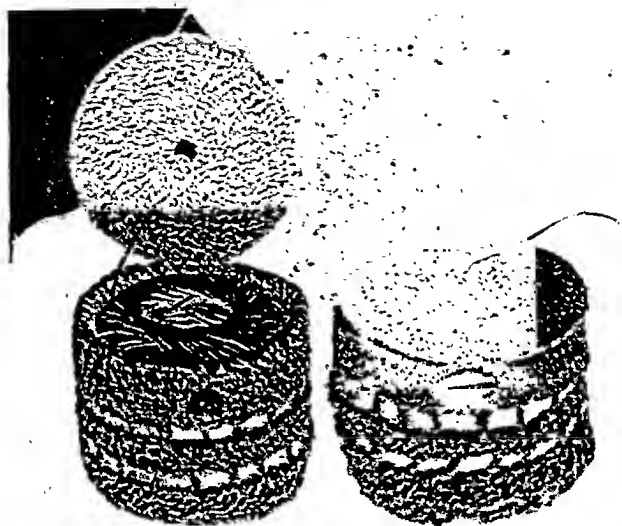
During the working of this basket, it is well to have the ball of string beside you, and to slip it into the basket after every two or three rows, as there is a danger of drawing in the sides of the basket unconsciously during the working. The ball of string should slip into the basket easily, and the loose end be put through the centre hole of the lid.

LIDS. Lids may be flat, curved, or peaked. In either case the beginning is exactly the same as for mats or baskets. A flat lid is simply a mat, made to the size of the basket it is to cover. It can be worked in any stitch desired, and be either solid, or varied with open work. It should be fastened on, and provided with loop and button in the same way as the lid of the basket for string.

To make a curved lid—begin to very slightly draw in the "tail," after two or three rows, round the centre hole ("nucleus"), not continuously, or the curve would be too abrupt. If desired it may be curved outward again to meet the brim of the basket.

The "peaked" lid is gradually increased in size in a gentle slant, from a tiny beginning until its circumference is exactly the size of the mouth of the basket.

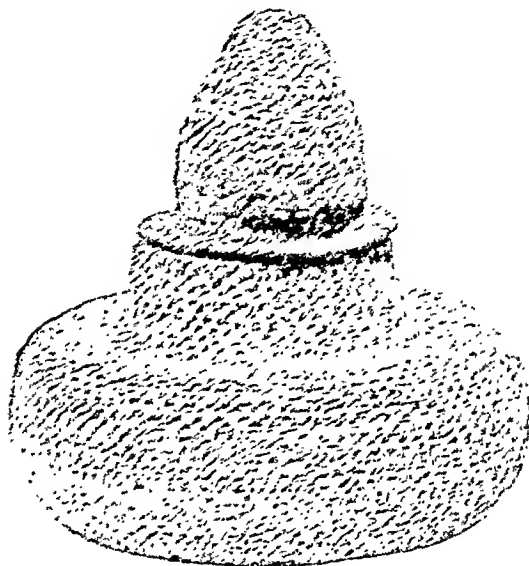
A variation of this is the "pagoda" lid, which is a

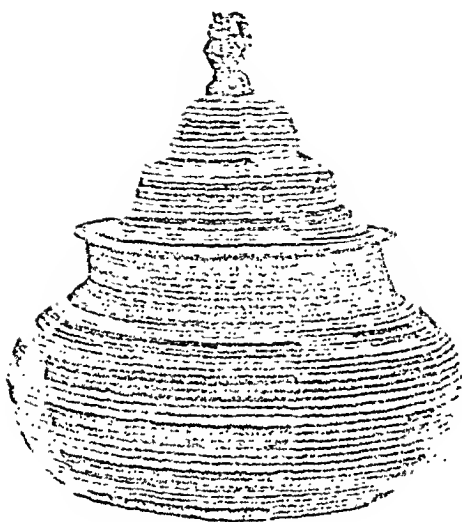


Two baskets for string, worked in several colours. The basket on the left is fastened by a loop and raffia button—that on the right by a long, coloured, wooden bead

succession of curves outward and inward, with a few vertical rows of work in between each curve.

All these lids may be sewn on with raffia at one side





Large raffia basket worked over cane in coloured and "natural," reproduced from a photograph in *The Studio*, by kind permission of the Editor

little wall should be not less than $\frac{1}{2}$ in. deep. Finish off. The lid should then slip easily into the basket. Then, at the point (on the outside) where the wall begins, lay a "tail" (strand) horizontally—holding it against the sides of the wall—and join it to the side of the lid with a close overcasting stitch. Continue these horizontal rows until a flat "flange" has been made, which will project, say, a couple of rows beyond the mouth of the basket. Finish off, graduating the work carefully. This makes a lid which fits into the basket easily, and yet is prevented from slipping in too far by its flat flange. If the lid is flat, it should have a knob or button, sewn on with raffia in the middle, in order to take hold of it easily. If it is a "pagoda" lid, its small pinnacle will be sufficient to take hold of.

CANE FOUNDATION. It will be as well to say a few words about cane, as a substitute for the raffia "tail." The rigidity and regularity of outline certainly introduces a new element into raffia work, in a sense, alien to it, and I consider the use of cane should not be encouraged except under certain circumstances.

Especially does this apply to the machine-finished cane which, to my mind, gives a "faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null" look to the work. It may be, however, advisable to substitute cane of a medium thickness for the raffia "tail" in the case of a really large waste-paper basket, or one designed to hold small logs beside the hearth, or a basket meant for unmended stockings, wool, etc., or large pieces of sewing, and intended to stand on the floor. It will still be necessary to include the unthreaded ends of the strands, but they will make no appreciable difference to the width of the cane "tail."



Note the lacing of the handle, and the covered cup. The former is long enough to sling the flask over the shoulder. The flat lid fastens with loop and raffia button. The basket with "ears" holds a glass flower-bowl

CHAPTER VII

BAGS—BUTTONS—LOOPS—COVERINGS FOR BOWLS.

FLASKS. CASSEROLES. ETC.—CUSHION COVERS

BAGS. These, of any size and shape, can be made of raffia. As an indication of methods let us take—

SHOPPING BAG. Make two large mats the same size (either round or rectangular) for its sides.

The base, which should be at least 3 in. wide, should be worked separately, and be very solid. The ends should be similar to the base, and both base and ends should be stitched to the sides with a close over-stitching of raffia. These three strips may be worked in two ways.

Either the usual beginning may be made, only with the loop about a third as long as the length of the strip required. As the strip must be solid, this loop should be filled in by darning stitches, under and over, and when the end of the loop is reached from which the "tail" starts, the work proceeds as if for a mat, holding the "tail" along the side of the solid loop and working to the left, as always, until the required width and length of the strip is reached.

Or, secondly, a simpler way is as follows—

Instead of a loop, make a number of buttonhole stitches on the strand of raffia, for the required width of the strip—then, using the remainder of the strand as "tail," proceed to work over the "tail" and into the buttonhole stitches until you reach the end of your line.

Now, instead of working round the top side of the line—reverse the work, as in a piece of plain knitting,

and work back again. Reverse the work in this way at the end of each row, bending the "tail" back, so that it is always to the left, and continue till the strip is long enough.

When the base and the ends are firmly sewn with raffia on to the sides, strong handles should be made and stitched on, at suitable intervals, to the sides, and the bag may be lined or not as desired.

The handles can be made of five or six strands firmly sewn on at each side, and closely woven with a strand of raffia, or they may be narrow strips, perhaps an inch in width, made like the base and ends. When finished, the rather uneven edges of these "strip" handles may be buttonholed with raffia to make a more regular line.

A bag for shopping or any other purpose may also be made of coarse, open canvas as a foundation, using the raffia merely as a means of covering this with stitchery.

Decorative designs are the most suitable and effective. Do not attempt purely pictorial effects.

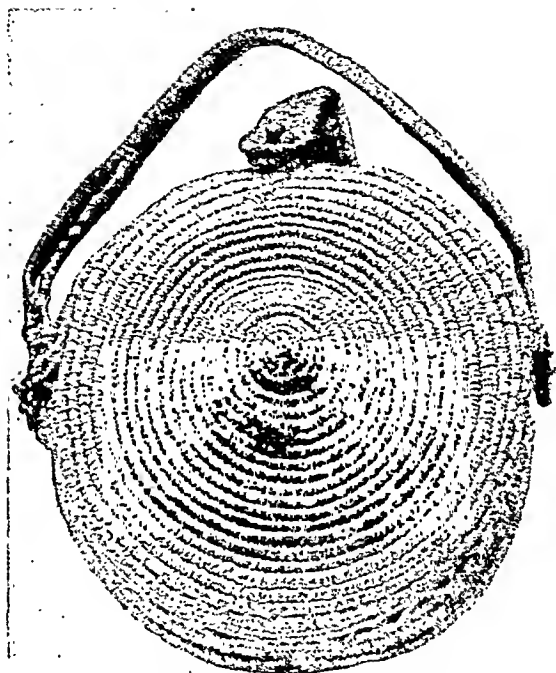
Fine stitches, such as are used in tapestry, cross-stitch and darning, can be used in raffia work. It only needs that the strands should be split up to the required fineness.

The handles of this bag may be made also of narrow strips of the canvas, turned in at the edges, and covered with raffia stitches. Such a bag needs to be lined. It is very durable and light.

Instead of canvas, a foundation of some durable material, such as hand-woven Russian crash may be used, which may be bought for a few pence a yard at most drapers, and a design, not necessarily covering



This shopping-bag has proved a "champion" for wear! It has been in constant use for twelve years and is as strong as ever. Its shield-like sides are joined by solid bars arranged in a zig-zag. The flap, fastening with loop and button, is a useful feature. It is worked in the "figure-eight" stitch, and the colouring is orange, purple, green, and pale buff



A side view of the same bag

the whole bag, may be embroidered upon it, using raffia, rather than wool or silk.

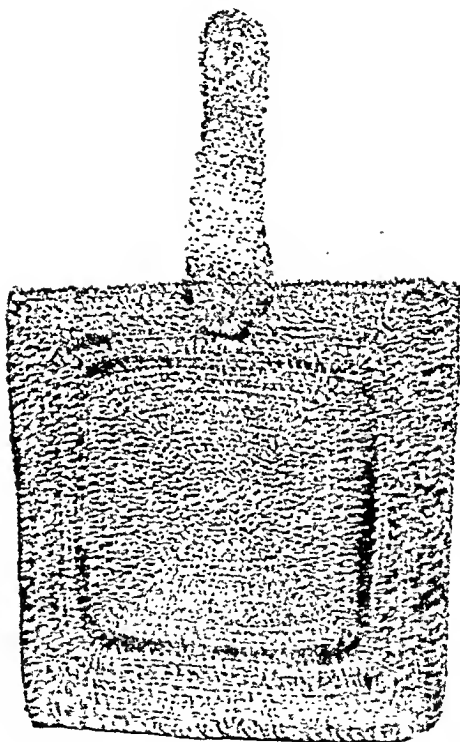
BUTTONS AND LOOPS. For a button, commence as usual with the solid ring—its loop being first drawn up as small as possible. Proceed till the tiny mat is the size of a sixpence. Then gradually draw the “tail” while working, till the work curves over to the size of a marble. This, of course, will be hollow, and if a very rigid button is wanted it is a good plan to insert, when the mat is just curving over, a round wooden bead, drawing up the work around it until it is completely covered.

Loops may be either buttonholed closely, or simply bound. If the latter, several loops should be bound together to give firmness.

RAFFIA COVERINGS. *Covering for Flower Bowl.* Select a plain bowl, oval or round, of the size suitable for holding flowers.

Use this as a model for size and shape, and make a raffia basket just large enough for the bowl to slip inside. The lip of the basket should come a little above the rim of the bowl. A handle may be added or not, as desired. This makes a decorative centrepiece. If the bowl is to be kept for gay flowers, the basket would look best worked in “natural,” or “natural” with a touch of green here and there. If it is to be kept for pale flowers, a gayly-coloured basket could be indulged in. A charming effect could be obtained by leaving a row of open spaces near the brim of the basket which would reveal slightly the bowl and stalks of the flowers, and thus secure a unity of bowl and cover.

Tumbler Holders. Have beside you an ordinary-sized tumbler. Make a round mat, slightly larger than the



An example of a rectangular shopping-bag with sides, and a handle intended to hang on the arm.
It is worked in the "nucleus" stitch



A shopping-bag made of linen—the design being embroidered with coloured raffia. The bag is lined, and the handles are made of strips of linen, blanket-stitched with raffia

base of the tumbler. Turn up, and proceed with the sides, constantly fitting the tumbler into the little basket to ensure perfection of fit. Work up until about half of the tumbler is covered. Both the base and the sides may be decoratively pierced with open spaces, as solidity is not required but only a sufficient amount of



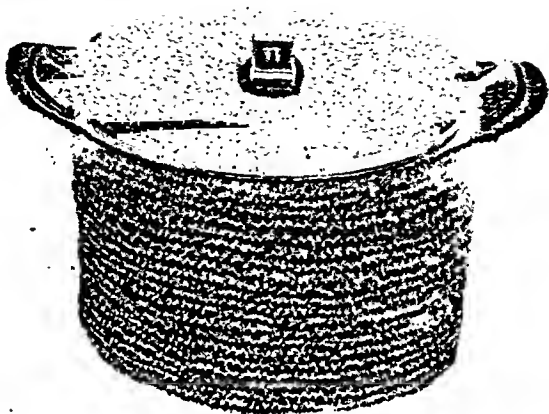
A cover for a flower bowl

work to protect the hand when the tumbler is filled with a hot drink.

Casserole Cover. This, like the tumbler holder, is just a basket made to fit the article. In this case the advantage is that the raffia cover or case may be placed on the lunch table, and the casserole brought straight from the oven and popped into it. The effect of the raffia cover is pleasing, and the dish is kept piping hot for some time. The side of the cover should be slightly higher than the side of the casserole, and, if desired, a cover for the lid may also be made.

Cover for Thermos Flask. This looks well made of raffia, and is particularly serviceable owing to its extreme lightness.

Begin with a solid mat of "nucleus" stitch, and make it a little larger than the base of the flask.



This picture of a covered aluminium casserole shows how raffia adapts itself to domestic uses. The casserole can be popped straight from the oven into its basket nest—and at once brought to table, where its contents will be served piping hot, and kept so for some time. It is a labour-saving device, giving a pleasing appearance to the lunch table

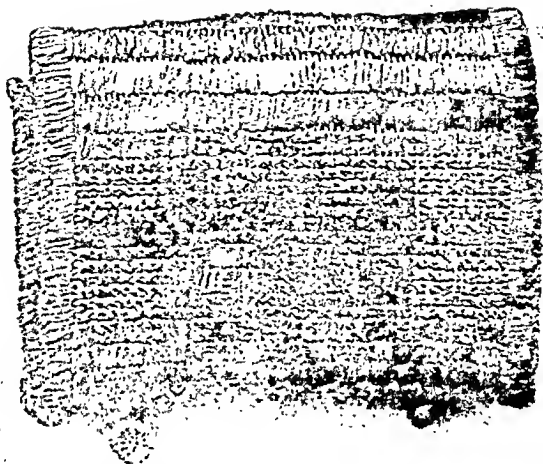
broadened so that the handle could not slip back. The strap should be long enough to allow of the flask being carried like a knapsack, or slung over the shoulder. Such a cover looks best in "natural," but it may be decorated with designs in colour.

Scent Bottle Cover. This is useful to prevent breakage when carrying scent bottles of any size on a journey. The method is exactly the same as for the flask cover, only that when the base of the neck is almost reached, the work must be drawn in by continual pulling of the "tail," as, usually, the narrowing is very abrupt. The work is continued up the neck of the bottle to the stopper, which, of course, must be left free. The difference between this and any other cover previously described, is that the bottle is not intended to come out of its cover, and, indeed, cannot do so, as the neck is so much smaller than the body of the bottle. Therefore, when the base of the neck is reached, it is necessary to fit in the bottle to the cover, so far made, and then continue to work round the neck with the stitching. It is not easy or pleasant to do this, but it is quite possible—and for this part of the work a long darning-needle will be found to be easier to handle than the short embroidery needle suggested for ordinary work. Again, I would use "natural" for this cover, with narrow bands of colour for decoration. These might be the colour of the flower from which the scent is made.

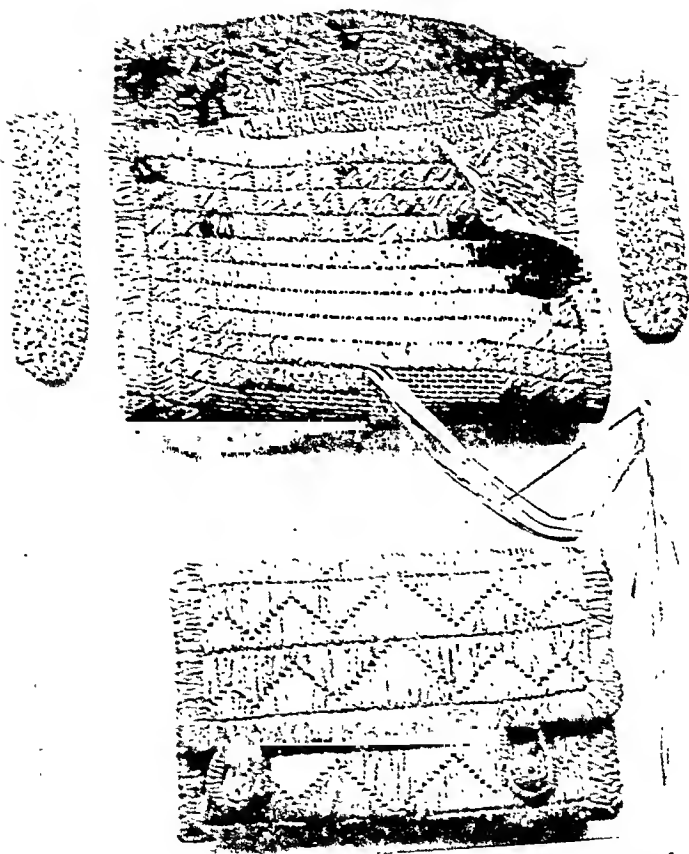
Cushion Covers. Very durable and decorative cushion covers can be made with raffia.

One method is that employed in chair covers, namely, covering completely a piece of stout material with raffia stitchery.

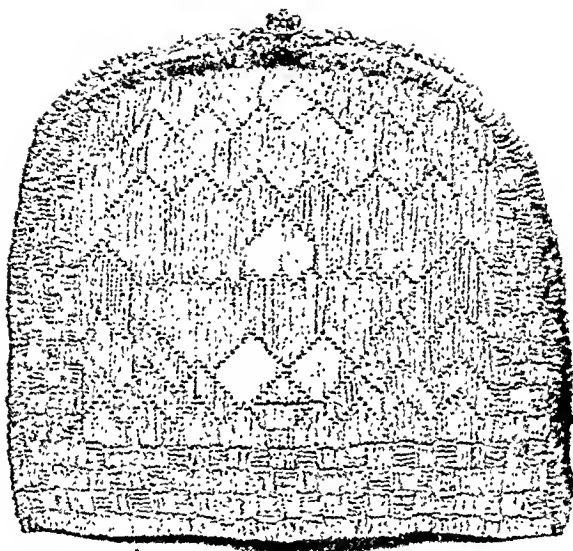
Another is to take coarse canvas as the foundation,



This pochette is worked on canvas. The design is carried out in red, grey, blue, and black. It is fastened by loops and raffia buttons, and has sides of about an inch in width.



(a) A pochette with canvas foundation, in process of making. Note the all-raffia sides, ready to be stitched in;
 (b) A finished pochette fastened with loops and raffia buttons



A cosy worked on canvas with coloured raffia. The design is in two shades of yellow against a blue background, with a border of brown

where the ends and sides will be joined together. At this point of junction a short, narrow strip (by which the cosy could be hung up) or a knob, or some other device in raffia suitable to the general design, makes an appropriate finish.

COAT-HANGERS. Coat-hangers, instead of being covered with silk, as is usual, are much more durable,

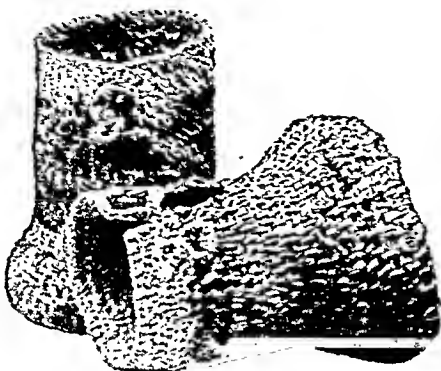


Example of coat hanger, padded, and covered with material embroidered all over with raffia in various colours

covered in raffia. The method is to cover a piece of coarse material (say, crash) with stitches in coloured raffia. All the stitches should go the same way and lie close to each other, so that none of the background is visible. The colours should be blended together as in the chair covers, and, when finished, the work should be well pressed (see section on "Pressing"). It should then be sewn round the already padded hanger, a hole being pierced in the centre of the strip for the handle to come through. The handle may be tightly wound with a strand of raffia and a glass or wooden bead forced on to the end of the hook to keep it fast.

SERVIETTE RINGS. These are very suitable for country-house tables, or for taking away from home on holidays.

The method is to make your first loop the size of the whole ring—then, working to the left as usual, and holding the “tail” along the side of the ring, proceed as in the “nucleus,” and follow on with the same stitch, pulling the “tail” almost constantly, but very



These gardening gauntlets are designed for coolness and comfort. They are substantially made, and will stand a lot of hard wear. Note the interesting fastenings at the cuff

slightly, each time—so that the circumference of the band, as the work grows, does not get larger than the original loop. The work, when finished, should be about 2 in. wide, and may be in “natural” or in blended colours.

Another method is to work the design on coarse canvas, cut to the size of the ring required, and joined up before the raffia stitching is begun, so that the spacing for the design may be accurate.

GAUNTLET CUFFS FOR GARDENING. These cuffs are very useful for keeping the sleeves clean and preventing

them from being torn by briars, etc. They should be worked in "natural" with an edging of colour, or a dark brown is serviceable, bordered with, say, a bright orange or red.

The method is to make the first loop the size of the



Raffia leaves, berries, and beginnings of flowers for a posy. When grouped together the stalks should be tightly wound round for about half an inch with raffia

widest part of the gauntlet—and work down, slightly decreasing in size, to the beginning of the cuff proper. Then, instead of continuing round and round, work backwards and forwards, till the cuff is sufficiently long, and fasten off. Attach one or two (according to the



A "rush" hat, showing what a charming decoration may be made with raffia leaves, berries, and flowers. This group is worked in soft shades of many colours

length of the cuff) loops and raffia buttons, so that the cuff wraps over to fit the wrist comfortably.

POSIES. The treatment of raffia flowers, leaves, berries, etc., requires a true feeling for art. It is not only inartistic, but impossible, to imitate faithfully the delicate texture of these beauties of Nature in the



Detail of leaves and flowers for a posy

rather hard and somewhat stubborn medium of raffia—and the attempt should not be made.

But flowers and leaves, etc., treated conventionally, may well be made of raffia and prove most effective and charming, either for hats, in groups or sprays, or for posies to wear on coats. There can be no hard and fast rules given for such work. It must depend for charm on the imagination of the worker. Roughly speaking, flower petals may be suggested by tiny mats, radiating from the point where they are sewn together. A raffia ball (i.e. a tiny mat drawn in more and more tightly till it forms a hollow sphere) makes a centre.

Leaves are, again, little mats—square, oval, or round.

Berries also can be suggested by the hollow balls, or,

as a variation, the ball may be finished off half-way, forming a little cup, and a round or long wooden bead may be sewn with raffia inside, to project slightly. These posies may have soft stalks made of several strands of raffia closely overcast, or they may be wired. The wire must be completely covered with raffia wound tightly and closely round it.

CHAPTER IX

HATS—HAT-BANDS

HATS. Raffia hats are extremely comfortable to wear—do not spoil with rain or fade quickly, and will last for years in constant use.

For an all-raffia hat, make a beginning as for a mat. This is the centre of the crown. There being such a wide range of hat shapes, it is impossible to give further detailed directions—but it may be said that curves are made as in baskets, and the perfection of the shape depends largely on manipulation. The “nucleus” stitch should be employed, and the “tail” kept as thin as possible to give lightness to the hat. A hat with a fairly high crown, and a 2 or 3 in. brim, takes a long time to make, but the result is well worth the trouble, given good workmanship and artistic colouring.

Another way of making a raffia hat is to buy a buckram or sparterie shape, and work it all over with coloured raffia, using long stitches and a bold design.

The brim should be worked on both sides, or the underside may be lined with a suitable coloured material.

Instead of a buckram or sparterie shape, an open trellis rush hat may be bought, and the raffia woven in and out of the holes in a design—or a solid rush hat may be embroidered with good effect with coloured raffia, also a fine straw hat in the same way.

Raffia may also be plaited for a hat—the plaits sewn together with fine raffia into the shape desired (see “Plaiting”) or the plaits may be stitched to a shape.



A "rush" hat for a child, decorated with raffia stitching and a raffia posy on the brim. It has been in use for three summers. The raffia is still fresh, and a joy to its little wearer

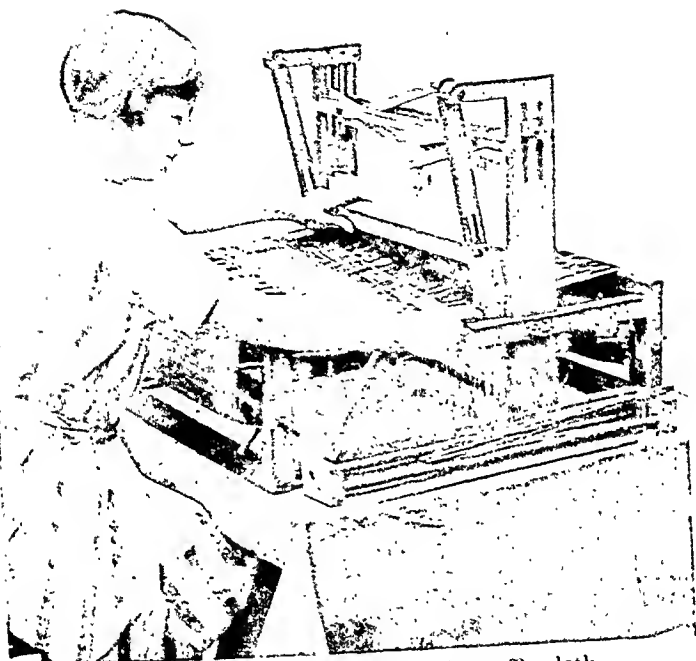
CHAPTER X

WEAVING—PLAITING

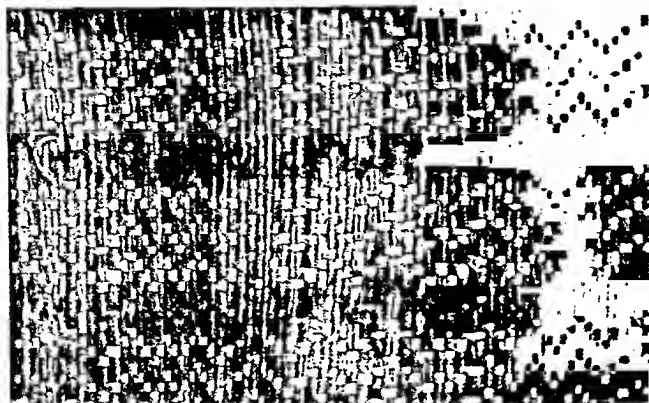
WEAVING, by which is meant, roughly, the interlocking of strands at right angles to each other, has not been confined, as might seem at first sight, to wool and the like. Long ago, the Tlingit Indians wove themselves capes and aprons of cedar-bark, as well as floor mats, all having decorative patterning. Woven coats from Paris, of vegetable fibre, were illustrated recently in the London Press.

A loom—called the Craftmart loom—has recently been devised for weaving ordinary raffia. Its features may be gathered from the illustration. It is so near in construction to an ordinary table loom that it is stated to be capable of use as such by changing the reed. Appliances of this kind may well open a new field for the raffia-worker who may like weaving, or the weaver who may care to see what can be done with raffia. There seems no reason why characteristic woven patterns, the very decorative “knotted-warp-end” finish, and other applicable wool technique should not be developed on efficient looms of this type.

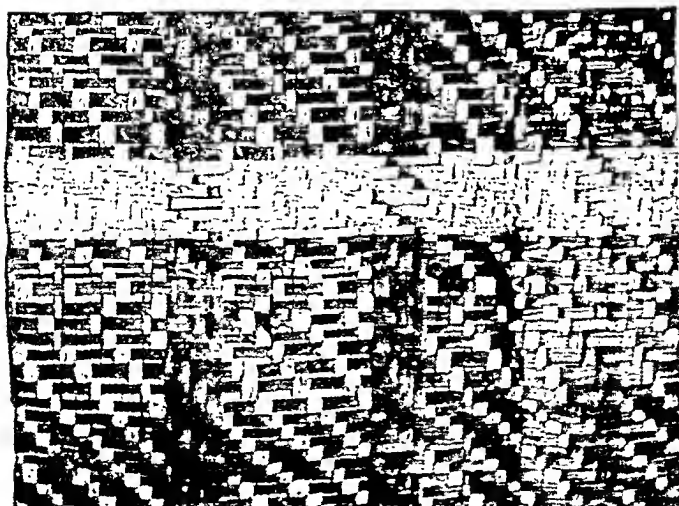
PLAITING. Raffia lends itself to plaiting, and mats, baskets, and hats can be made by sewing the plaits together. Plaiting the many yards required for a hat is a long operation, but it is a pleasant occupation for a “fireside” evening. The selected strands may be knotted together to begin with, and if there is a drawer in the room, the knot can be placed just inside the open drawer, and then the drawer shut tightly upon it. Or



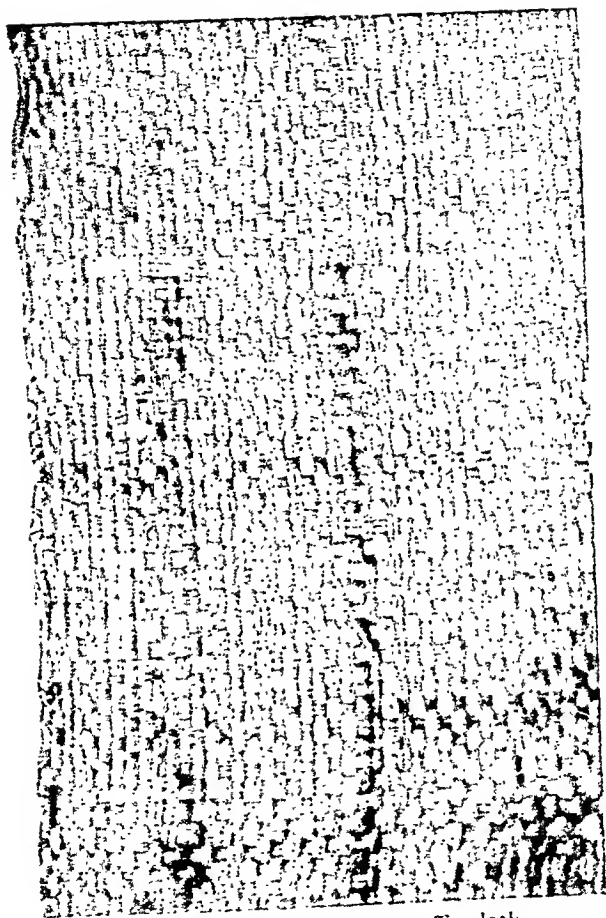
The "Craftmart" loom for weaving raffia cloth



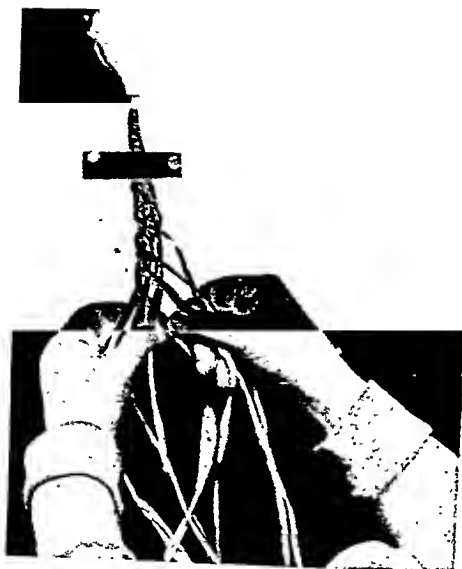
An example of woven raffia cloth, showing a very simple but effective design in three colours



Still another raffia weave, embodying a more elaborate design in several colours



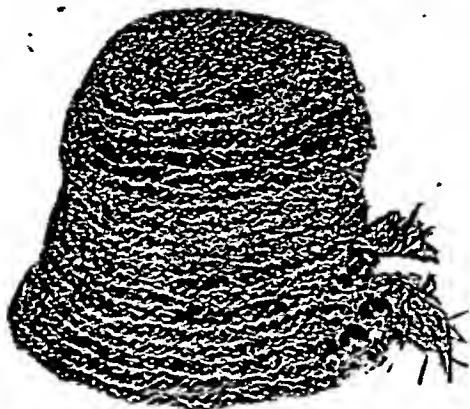
Another example of woven raffia cloth



Showing the formation of a seven-strand plait. Such plaits can be sewn together to form either hats or baskets

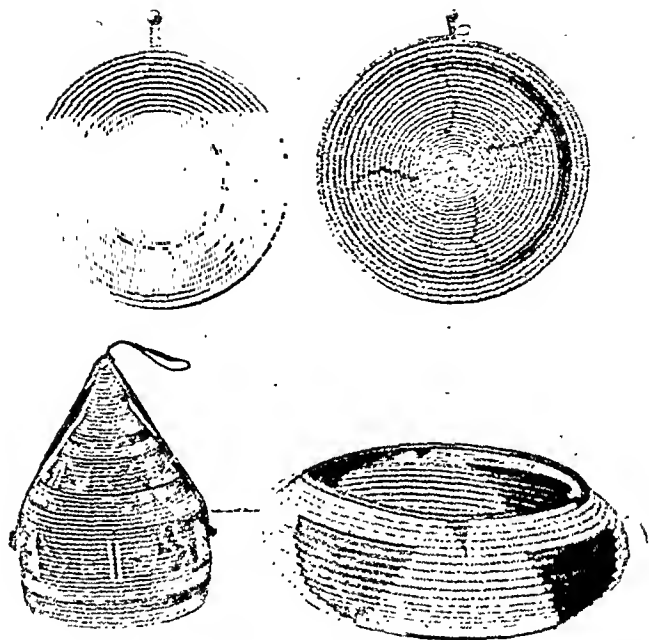
the knot can be pinned firmly to the tablecloth, or at the worker's knee, and the pin altered as the plait grows in length.

The method of plaiting with any number of strands after the ordinary three, is to take the outer one on the



An all-rafia hat, with a bunch of raffia berries and stalks at the side. In this case plaiting has been employed—the plaits being stitched together, with fine raffia, into the shape required. It is extremely light and comfortable

left, and weave it through the others to the extreme right, then take the next on the left, and do likewise, and so continue—always taking the outermost left-hand strand and weaving it through all the others. The number of strands makes no difference. Any number desired can be used with this weaving method. A five, seven, or nine plait is suitable for hat making.



From the Collection of the Imperial Institute

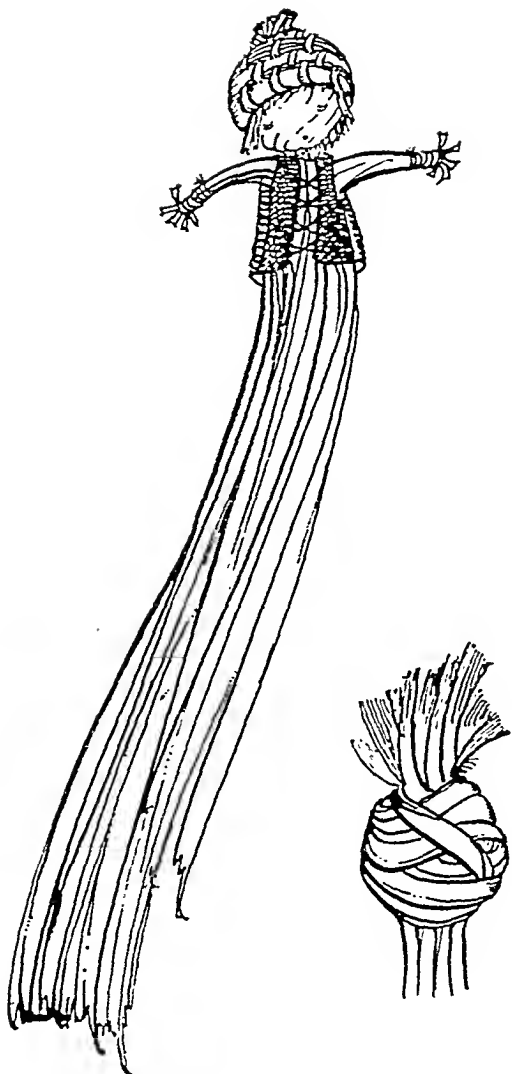
Two mats from Sierra Leone, the first is in cream and purple-reds, the second is in black, reds, and yellows: they show well-placed pattern and good methods of filling a circle. The first, especially, is suggestive of many designs

The covered basket from the Sudan is for holding a coffee-pot. It is in purple, red-golds, and dark greens. The form is good and the carrying device is interesting. The decorated basket is from Sierra Leone, the pattern for placing and mass is perfect. Using that as a basis, a great many new and interesting designs could be thought out

CHAPTER XI

FOR YOUNG CRAFTSMEN

EVERY worker devoting himself to raffia, after all only a subsection of the very ancient craft of basketry, would do well to study George Wharton James' *Indian Basketry* (Henry Malkam, 1 William Street, New York), as well as the primitive baskets in the various museums. When one ponders over such baskets and sees the loving care taken by the Indian mothers and daughters over them, one begins to realize how much we, particularly in school and camp life, miss not only by using "ready-made" materials but also by adopting the "ready-made" outlook. Many of our native grasses, although not, perhaps, outstandingly good, are suitable enough for baskets of one kind or another, and if only for inspiration's sake, the children should be encouraged to hunt about in the woods for them. The American Indian knew by tradition and instinct which were the best swamps or patches of ground to go to, and at what time of the year to make expeditions and fill their pack-baskets with reeds, stems, roots, and berries. The grasses had to be carefully selected and gathered while they were still tender and before flowering. When picked, the bunch would often be put into boiling water and left till it took on a soft yellow tone. Then it would be stored away. Where splitting was necessary, the worker first damped the grass by sucking water through the hollow stem; she then passed her long, sharp finger-nail down the centre and wound the halves for a moment around her finger in order to



A knot of rafia, with rafia coat and cap

flatten out. Spruce roots were much used for the foundation of grass-baskets. They were often prepared by charring them, immediately after digging, in a fire, and then pulling pieces through a split stick to remove the bark or skin. Then they were spread out to dry. For final splitting they were soaked. Often the knife was a blue mussel shell, sharpened to a keen edge. The



From the collection of the Imperial Institute

An American Indian pack-basket

outer splits were looked on as the best. The Tlingit tribe decorated their baskets with plant and grass stems embroidered-in whilst working and showing only on the outside of the basket. Sometimes they used wild wheat straw, which gave little flecks of white, or cedar bark made black by soaking in black mud. They got red tones from spruce bark, also soft greens and browns from various roots and stems. Purple was obtained by placing the material in a hot mush, made by boiling huckleberry mashed with a little water.

This was lightened by "watering-down." Yellow lichen furnished yellow. Greenish shades of blue came from boiling hemlock-bark with natural oxide of copper. Straws would be dyed before splitting; roots after being made ready for use.

All these points offer suggestions to teachers and parents with imagination and adaptability; to all, indeed, who can admire the simple yet often deep artistry which enabled such primitive races to make their surroundings gay and beautiful. Our imagination tends to be overborne by the complexity of modern life. Perhaps it would be no bad thing for us at times to put our complexities aside and open our minds to natural things. Without imitating the Indians, we can get something of the outlook of the Indians into our basketry: something of that knowledge which was like the knowledge of birds who, from thistledown, moss, and fine grasses, will construct the most intricate and complex nests, cunningly selecting the right materials of the right dryness, texture, and thickness, and then weaving and pressing them into an entirely efficient whole.

It will be found that there are very few things illustrated in this book which a junior craftsman of one age or another cannot do good work at.

We would give warning against the practice of devising too many "things for children to make." It is much better, from the psychological and every other point of view, to allow children to attack the same problems as their elders, with, of course, due allowance for age and general circumstances. But the more one sees of teaching children the higher one is inclined to put their capacity. Teachers and parents of modern



A raffia doll

type are more and more clearly realizing that you do not arouse a child's most vital interest by giving it a stone when it asks for bread.

A child can soon learn to make a raffia hat for a doll. The method is exactly the same as for an adult's hat—but, being in miniature, it will not take long to fashion,



Doll-dressing

and so be well within the scope of a child's patience. The child should be encouraged to choose its own colours and combinations, and to make a good fit by frequent "tryings on."

Little mats for dolls' houses, and many things in miniature for its furnishing, may be made of raffia. If a little sleeveless coat is attempted, such as the doll in the frontispiece is wearing—a brown paper pattern to



Details of the doll's waistcoat and hat: To make the work fine and pliable the raffia strands have been split into fine threads

fit the doll should be cut first in three pieces—the back and the two fronts. The working is done from side to side, measuring it frequently by the pattern, and the seams are overcast closely with raffia. The edges should be finely buttonholed.

Raffia can be woven on a very simple “loom.” A junior craftsman could make one—a wooden frame with tacks or small nails driven in at regular intervals at both ends, to which should be attached the strands of raffia forming the warp. Strands are then passed in and out



Doll's shoes

of the warp, making horizontal rows—each row being pushed close to the preceding one with a dinner fork having rather wide-spaced prongs, until the frame is filled with a close textured material. When taken off the frame, the ends of fringe can be knotted as in wool weaving, or each strand can be threaded, and woven back into the material, making a neat, firm edge.

Colour could be introduced, both in warp and weaving strands, and simple patterns, such as checks and stripes, will give an added interest to the work.

Women's institute members in particular may be interested in the fact that the ancestor of the “haybox” was used by the old American Indian mothers, especially those of the Tlingit tribe, who took a great pride

in their household gear. The "haybox" was a stout, closely-woven basket, so well made that it would retain liquids. Food was placed in the basket and covered with water. Then hot stones were put in until the



From the Collection of the Imperial Institute

Toys from Bermuda. They are made from strips pulled from the leaf of the banana tree. Good use is made of the various interesting textures and of the natural tones of browns and greys.

water nearly boiled, the lid put on, and the dinner left until cooked. This tribe also made drinking-vessels of basketry.

It is fine that the merchant should supply us with good materials; but detailed ready-made designs are of the essence of the machine outlook. You miss

nine-tenths of the fun of raffia-working if you do not try to work out your own articles to meet your needs. Let us leave second-hand thinking to the machine, even if we have to remember quite frequently the true craftsman's motto, "A poor thing, but mine own." The spirit of spontaneous, joyful effort is that of the artist and the craftsman in all ages.

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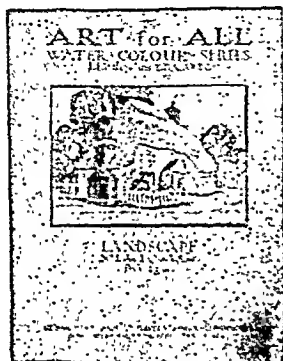
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